

Five-Star CAD

I'm a sucker for computer programs that are powerful, easy to use and pack a lot of bang for the buck. Usually, in fact, I limit this column to programs meeting all of these criteria—in recognition of the fact that few remodelers have lots of time or money to plow into software.

But in software, as in life, some choices aren't simple or clearcut. A case in point is Cadkey's \$149.95 DataCAD 5.

■ DataCAD is a gourmet dinner at a Happy Meal price.

DataCAD is a full-featured, three-dimensional, DOS-based computer-aided design program rivaling such high-end products as Autodesk's AutoCAD and Graphisoft's ArchiCAD. It has all the features and tools most

residential designers would ever want. Indeed, DataCAD comes with built-in routines that guide you through such complex tasks as designing 3-D roofs and stairwells, as well as placing and sizing 3-D windows and doors. It ships with more than 1,600 pre-drawn architectural symbols, many of them three-dimensional. And it has lots of other useful touches as well. Toggling between floor plan and elevation views, for instance, involves only a couple of keystrokes or mouse clicks. And the program comes with a top-drawer rendering program called Velocity, which can produce photo-realistic 3-D views of your designs.

Despite all this power, DataCAD now sells for less than one-twentieth of the price of its high-end rivals. As such, it's an impressive bargain—kind of like getting a gourmet dinner for the price of a Happy Meal.

The cheap-eats price came about earlier this year when

Malcolm Davies, Cadkey's CEO, became frustrated that DataCAD was languishing in the market with its \$1,995 price tag. He cut the program's price, first to \$495 and then to \$149.95. Since then, Cadkey has sold more than 30,000 copies of the program, more than tripling DataCAD's installed base. The promotion has been a success—so much so, in fact, that Davies now plans to sell a Windows-based ver-

dead ends. You'll find yourself attempting something you know the program can do, yet, try as you might, you can't figure out how.

On the other hand, DataCAD isn't any more difficult to master than other five-star CAD programs. All of these high-end CAD packages are designed with full-time users in mind. These users tend to be people who don't mind complexity so long as the programs they're using

deliver results. They're people who expect to spend weeks, or even months, learning a new application. Alas, most remodelers aren't full-time designers, nor do they have anyone on staff who is. This means that, for all their power, many CAD programs—including DataCAD—may command a steeper learning curve than most part-time designers are willing (or able) to climb.

So what's the bottom line? If you don't already own a high-end CAD program, should you consider buy-

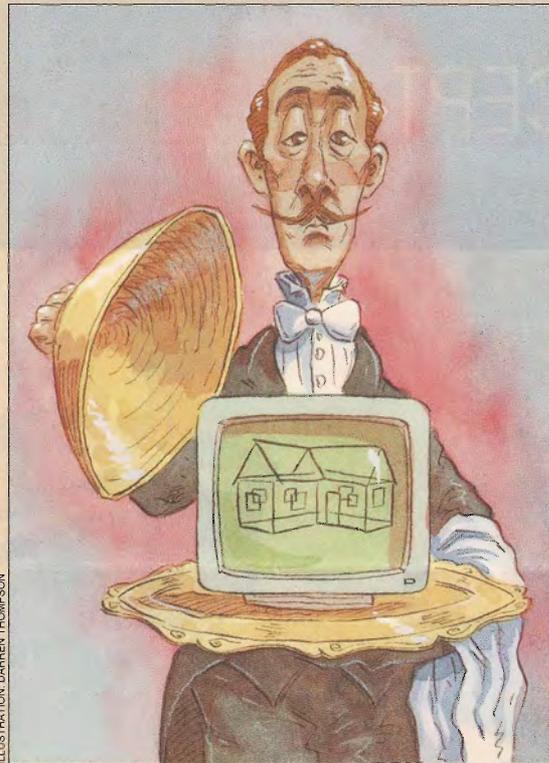


ILLUSTRATION: DARREN THOMPSON

sion of the program, due for release late this year, for the same price, according to Cadkey publicist Danielle Cote.

That's the good news. The bad news is that DataCAD is tough to learn. You'll spend hours reading manuals and scratching your head before figuring out how to do much useful work with this program. Even then, if you're anything like me, you'll occasionally hit frustrating

ing DataCAD? By all means—especially if you've got \$150 to burn and aren't scared off by the possibility that this may be more program than you can master. Also, keep in mind that you'll need a fairly recent computer to run it—at least a 386 with a math coprocessor and 4 MB of RAM. ■